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## Worst quorum crisis

### Number of lawmakers declines to 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Still in its maiden session, the one-month-old eighth Jatiya Sangsad yesterday suffered the worst crisis of quorum in the recent history leading to adjournment of the House.

The House transacted its business for 75 minutes – first for five minutes and again for 70 minutes – without quorum, that is presence of at least 60 members in the 300-strong parliament. Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar had to adjourn the House with the number of lawmakers declining to only 25.

In fact, the quorum crisis surfaced

barely two days after the new parliament had gone into its maiden session on October 28. Delayed start of the sittings had become a daily affair these days. Last week, sittings were delayed by half an hour on average. The situation worsened further this week with sittings starting an hour behind schedule on an average.

Repeated appeals by the speaker failed to make any difference. The backbenchers aside, top ministers on the front row were also irregular. With Leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia attending the proceedings occasion-

ally, her cabinet colleagues registered delayed or brief attendance as well. And, the ordinary MPs followed suit for obvious reason.

Since Prof. AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury became the president on November 14, the House has been running without a deputy leader in the treasury bench.

Yesterday's sitting began one hour behind the scheduled start of 11:00am with Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui in the chair. In the beginning, the House had a little over the required number of 60 lawmakers including a few minis-

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## Accord on formula for interim council to run Afghanistan

AP, Koenigswinter (Germany)

The northern alliance and the former King's delegation agreed yesterday on a formula for an interim council that will run Afghanistan until a national council of tribal leaders can be convened in March, an adviser to the northern alliance said.

This is an important breakthrough because had it not come through these talks would have bogged down, but now they have a focus, said Mohammad Hussain Bakhshi, an aide to northern alliance delegate Mohammad Natiqi.

The two largest delegations at the talks have agreed the council would comprise 42 members, with 21 members each from the northern alliance and delegation of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah, Bakhshi said.

He said some provision may be made for representation from the two smaller delegations at the talks, exiles based in Peshawar, Pakistan and in Cyprus.

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An Afghan carpet seller placing his carpets in order at a market in Kabul yesterday. Many Afghan carpet sellers sell carpets with women's pictures that had previously been forbidden under Taliban rule.

## Go for scientific study instead of reviewing old data

### Suggest experts as debate on gas reserve raises storm

SHARIER KHAN

The government's decision to form a committee to reassess the country's gas reserves on the basis of existing studies would be a futile exercise and would hardly help end the on-going debate on the issue, according to energy experts.

They feel that instead of using old estimates, the committee comprising experts of Petrobangla and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) should have undertaken a scientific study of the existing gas fields. The aim of such a study should have been to eliminate guessworks and arrive at a concrete reserve figure backed by new scientific data.

They however appreciated the government decision to form an economic committee with renowned economists and lawyers of the country to assess the economics of pipeline gas export.

"For the first time, economists have been involved to look into the economic aspect (of gas export) instead of leaving it up to Petrobangla alone," said an energy ministry official.

Unocal's proposal to export gas from Bangladesh to India through a

pipeline in October stoke up a fresh debate over gas reserves. It was further fuelled by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman's statement that the government has been considering gas export. Later, State Minister for Energy Mosharrar Hossain made several policy statements on the issue.

Mosharrar Hossain on several occasions dished out an unofficial BUET reserves estimate of 16 trillion cubic feet (TCF) instead of the Petrobangla estimate of 11.3 TCF.

Unocal and some BUET experts have also been projecting higher gas reserves. They argue that the country has enough gas for itself and as its gas demand is 'saturated', it would be wise to export the total volume of 2.4 TCF from the Bibiyana gas field discovered by Unocal in 1998.

Meanwhile, energy experts, academicians, bureaucrats, politicians and social activists held more than two dozen seminars, rallies and other programmes over the gas export issue. Opinions went mostly against the export option.

The Left Democratic Alliance observed a half-day hartal on November 15 protesting the move to export gas. Protest rallies were held in Dhaka, Sylhet

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## Launch mishap 50 feared drowned in Barisal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least 50 people are feared drowned or missing as a passenger launch sank in the river Kalabadar in Mehendiganj upazila of Barisal at

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## Permission to open bank in UK

SHAHRIAR KARIM

After years of consultations and groundwork, the government has got the final nod from the Financial Services Authority (FSA) to set up a bank in the United Kingdom (UK) named Sonali Bank (UK) Ltd.

The FSA of the UK gave the approval on November 27 to open the bank.

Earlier, the country's biggest

nationalised commercial bank (NCB) Sonali Bank (SB) was forced to close its UK operations in June, 1999 following fund mismanagement. The six SB branches in the UK used to work under license from the Bangladesh Bank. FSA however allowed SB to maintain a representative office in London.

But, from now on the Sonali Bank (UK) Ltd will function as an independent bank under license from

FSA with 10 million pounds paid-up capital. The government has 51 per cent share in the new bank while SB's share is 49 per cent.

After the closure of SB's operation in the UK, the finance ministry, Bangladesh Bank (BB) and SB authorities opened discussions with the Bank of England (BoE) for resumption of its operation. The immediate past BB Governor Dr

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## Alleged participation in 'Janatar Mancha' 11 top officials get forced retirement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eleven high officials from the 1973 batch of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) were given forced retirement yesterday.

They include Additional Secretary Rashidul Alam. The rest 10 are Mohammad Musa, Dr. Mujibur Rahman, Mominullah Patwari, Khan Belayet, Rezina Khanam, Hemayetuddin Talukder, MA Taher, Abdul Hai, Mohammad Hossain Serniabad and Asaduzzaman Bhuiyan. Eight of them are joint secretaries and two deputy secretaries.

Sources claimed that the government has plans for forced retirement of some other officials from 1973 batch under the provision that upon completion of 25 years of service, an official may retire or may be given forced retirement.

The government took the decision assuming that the 11 officials were supporters of Awami League, the sources claimed.

The BNP government believes that these officials played a role in setting up the Janatar Mancha (People's Dais) of Awami League in 1996 and worked against the then BNP government.

The 1973 batch is sometimes termed 'Tofael's batch'. It is alleged that

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## Nasir's aide Humayun killed in gunfight with BCL activists in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A frontline cadre of Islami-e-Chhatra Shibir and second-in-command of the infamous Nasir group, Humayun Kabir, who was injured in a gunfight with the BCL cadres at Nazirhat, succumbed to his injuries at the CMCH last night.

The gunfight that took place between the Nasir group of Fatikhari led by Humayun and the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) cadre, known as Didar group, also

left Didar, a terrorist, killed on the spot. Recently, Didar defected to the BCL from Nasir group.

Police and witnesses said the two terrorist groups were engaged in a fierce gunfight at Dhurangkul of Roshangiri at Nazirhat in the evening. Humayun and few others were also injured in the gunfight.

Being informed of the incident, Hathazari police arrested Humayun Kabir and his four accomplices from Hathazari in the evening.

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ACI  
Iftar

### Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Nov	Sehri	Iftar
14	30	-	5-14
15	Dec 1	5-00	5-14
16	Dec 2	5-00	5-14